

TECHNOLOGY

in boston public schools

Technology and education are inextricably linked in Boston. With all of the technology programs in the schools today, it is hard to imagine that just seven years ago, there was only one computer for every 63 students. Furthermore, there were no classrooms with high-speed networks and fewer than 10 percent of teachers had technology training.

At that time, Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant promised that technology would become an important part of education in Boston. With the help of teachers, administrators, parents, and students all over the city, they have fulfilled that promise. Today, there is one computer for every four students, every classroom has

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Families celebrated completing the Technology Goes Home training program at the Evening on the Bridge event at Franklin Park. Above, Mayor Thomas M. Menino joins Alejandro and Alejandra Baez. At right, "Benjamin" the clown shows Adam Gabriel Tolbert, 3, how to balance a spinning ball.



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Families gain greater access to technology

BY KAETLIN RAHL

Efforts to provide Boston students with the most modern technology are not limited to the classroom.

Technology Goes Home (TGH) is a family technology training program that operates through community collaboratives and the Boston Public Schools. At the end of the program, each participating family receives a new computer, printer, and Internet access for a nominal cost.

The program is funded by the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation, which was created by Mayor Thomas M. Menino to support and promote community- and school-based technology-education programs that target low-income families and students. TGH is designed to improve children's academic performance, enhance adult employment opportunities, and increase community collaboration.

Classes operate in six Boston neighborhoods with 65 community-based organizations and in 14 schools throughout the system. The community program began in 2000 and was expanded to the schools in 2002. Since its inception, nearly 600 families have been trained with the TGH curriculum.

Currently in its second year, TGH@School is the product of a close collaboration between the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation and the Boston Public Schools' Office of Instructional Technology. TGH@School operates in fourth-grade classes at 13 elementary schools and at TechBoston Academy, a pilot high school that integrates technology throughout the curriculum. The program will soon expand to include every elementary school in the system.

Prior to the start of the school year, parents at the participating schools have the opportunity to apply for the program. All of the students whose families are accepted to participate are assigned to a special classroom. In the fall, parents and students participate in 25 hours of specialized

technology classes after school and on Saturday. Among other skills, families learn the basics of operating systems, troubleshooting, spread sheets, word processing, the Internet, e-mail, and how to use the MyBPS intranet network.

"The focus is not so much on technology but on how you use it as a tool to learn," said Steve Gag, chief operating officer of the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation and the mayor's technology advisor. This distinction between using technology for its own sake and using technology as an integral part of the school curriculum is even more pronounced in the second year of the program.

All of the technical skills that families learn are integrated into students' regular work. One example is the way in which families learn word processing. The project begins when students read a novel or short story at school. The teacher then explains the idea of a short response question and discusses it in relation to the English Language Arts portion of the MCAS exam. The students go home with a question about the reading and discuss and write down an answer with their parents. When the families attend their TGH training, they type their answers and learn how to format them. In this way, technology supports learning.

At the end of the program, families purchase a new computer, software, printer, and Internet access through a special Fleet Bank loan program. Families pay less than \$15 per month and the loan requires no interest, no down payment, and no credit check.

The results of TGH are impressive. Thirty-five percent of graduates report obtaining a new or better job after attending the program and 90 percent of parents report that their child's schoolwork improved.

But the most meaningful rewards of TGH@School are the less tangible ones.

"There is an incredible bonding that occurs between parent and child," said TGH@School

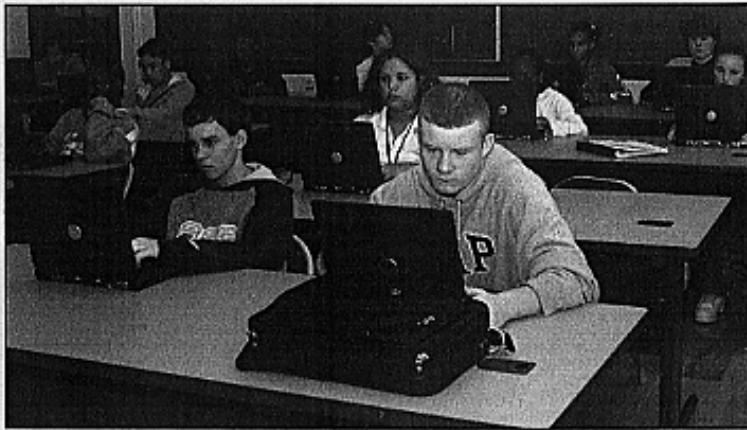
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a high-speed network connection, and 90 percent of teachers have completed at least 50 hours of technology training on their own time. According to Steve Gag, chief operating officer of the Boston Digital Bridge Foundation and the mayor's technology advisor, the commitment of teachers throughout Boston has been critical to the success of the technology initiative. "We could not have done it without a parallel commitment from the teachers," he said. "They realized that technology can make a difference." Technology Goes Home and MyBPS are two of the ways that Boston is using technology to enhance and support teaching and learning.



Above, Mary Anne and Ken Novak are among the donors who support Boston's Technology Goes Home program. At right, Andrew Foley, left, and Ricky Mace use computers in their class at TechBoston Academy at the Dorchester Education Complex.



MyBPS keeps schools connected

BY KAITLIN RAHL

When MyBPS, the intranet network portal of the Boston Public Schools, is fully developed and implemented, it will connect every administrator, teacher, staff member, parent, and student in the district.

"MyBPS is important as a community tool within the district," said Director of Instructional Technology Ann Grady. "It is a resource where information can be found and updated immediately."

Currently, when users within the school system log on to MyBPS, they immediately have access to BPS events and news. The network's home page also has links that lead users to more specialized pages, such as information from the superintendent's office, teaching and learning resources for teachers, and research assessment and evaluation tools for both teachers and administrators. Each page features a photo of the department head.

"We want to make people visible to create connections in a distinct this large," said Assistant Director of Instructional Technology for Program Development Alice Santiago. "That way, users can match faces to the names they have heard many times. I feel strongly about that."

As head of the user component of MyBPS, Santiago works with editors, programmers, other information technology staff and regular users in order to translate the technical aspects of the system. She trains teachers, administrators and staff in how to take advantage of all of the resources that MyBPS makes available to them.

"I try to give people the big picture," she said. "I want to make connections and link different offices so that people can work together more effectively."

MyBPS is just one part of the district's Focus on Children II education reform plan, whose goal is to "accelerate the continuous

improvement of teaching and learning to enable all students to meet high standards."

LINC Boston II is a comprehensive five-year plan to use technology to support the unifying goal of Focus on Children II.

The district is in the second year of the five-year plan. This year BPS is moving all systems online, including student assignments and attendance, employee records, transcripts and the special education system.

"In years past, all BPS documents had to be printed, and a certain number of copies had to be sent to each school," Santiago said. "If there was an update or error, we would have to send new documents."

Now, the district can update and disseminate information quickly, easily and effectively through the internet. When information is posted in MyBPS, it is marked with a star for seven days so that frequent users can find recent news quickly. By eliminating clerical work, MyBPS has greatly increased the

efficiency of most departments.

When the five-year plan is complete, principals, teachers, family members and students will all have access to the intranet, which is accessible only by password. MyBPS will provide secure data to users based on their specific needs and authorization. This authentication process will protect the privacy of students and families.

Depending on their level of access, users will be able to review student work, assess progress, identify areas of needed improvement, and communicate with one another. Teachers will also be able to collaborate to develop and share curricula and lesson plans, and to pursue professional development opportunities.

"It has been operating for a year and a half, and MyBPS is already becoming part of the culture," Santiago said. "My experience is that people are accepting it enthusiastically."